

CHAPTER 6

LAND AND WATER CONSERVATION FUND PROGRAM PRIORITIES AND FUNDING CYCLE

In this chapter, the relationship between the Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP) and the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) program is summarized, priorities for LWCF funds identified, and the schedule for applying for a LWCF grant outlined, assuming continued funding of the LWCF grant program.

THE LWCF GRANT PROGRAM

The LWCF Act of 1965, as amended, had a stated goal of providing a nationwide legacy of high quality outdoor recreation. The Act created a 50/50 match grant program available to State and local governments to acquire, develop and improvement basic outdoor recreation facilities to serve the general public. In Alaska, this program is administered at the state level by Alaska State Parks.

SCORP AND THE LWCF PROGRAM

To be eligible to participate in the LWCF program, each state must have a current SCORP on file with the National Park Service (the federal agency responsible for administering the LWCF). Through the SCORP planning process, agencies and the public identify capital investment priorities for acquiring, developing, and protecting outdoor recreation resources. These priority needs are then used as a guide to direct the state's allocation of its LWCF apportionment. Proposals that are 1) submitted by eligible applicants, 2) for eligible types of projects, and 3) that address priority needs identified in the SCORP, are eligible to compete for 50/50 matching grants.

THE OPEN PROJECT SELECTION PROCESS

The Open Project Selection Process (OPSP) was developed to accomplish the following goals:

1. Provide for public knowledge of and participation in the formulation and application of the project selection process utilized by the state in allocating LWCF assistance.
2. Ensure that all potential state and local applicants are aware of the availability of and process for obtaining LWCF assistance, and provide opportunities for all eligible agencies to submit project applications and have them considered on an equitable basis.
3. Provide a measurable link, through published selection criteria, to the specific outdoor recreation needs and priorities identified in SCORP policies and implementation programs.

4. Assure that the distribution of LWCF assistance is accomplished in a non-discriminatory manner, especially with regard to minority populations, the elderly and people with disabilities, and ensure a fair and equitable evaluation of all applications for LWCF assistance.

Through the OPSP, project proposals are submitted to Alaska State Parks according to the schedule outlined at the end of this chapter. Proposals are evaluated, scored, and ranked based on 12 factors, one of which is compliance with needs and objectives of the SCORP. Compliance with SCORP objectives is weighted more heavily than are other criteria. The maximum number of points awarded a project through the evaluation process is 150; up to 55 points are awarded to projects addressing high SCORP priorities.

Other criteria for project selection include: compliance with a local plan, public support, sponsor's ability to operate and maintain project after completion, site suitability, proximity to public areas or facilities, age groups served, special populations served, environmental impact, per capita share of LWCF money previously received by sponsor, and innovative or creative aspects of the project.

Appendix G contains the full Open Project Selection Process.

LOCAL RECREATION PLAN

Because the SCORP's priorities are generalized and may not accurately address a specific community's needs, Alaska State Parks grant administration staff developed the "local recreation plan" option. Completion of this plan will not only help sponsors better compete for LWCF grants, it will assure that grants are awarded based on community as well as statewide priorities. See Appendix E for local recreation plan guidelines.

A project must be identified as a priority need in the SCORP to be eligible for funding from the LWCF program. However, a project identified as a priority need in either a local or a regional plan as well as the SCORP will be awarded additional points in the LWCF scoring process, thus providing a distinct scoring advantage for that project.

Alaska's OPSP requires project proposals to be identified in a local or regional plan. For communities without any formal plan in place, an adopted local recreation plan will meet this requirement.

The local recreation plan is not meant to replace existing comprehensive local or regional plans. However, in communities with outdated plans (over 10 years old), a local recreation plan may be submitted to advance a project not identified in the original plan, provided the local recreation plan is approved as an addendum to the original plan.

PRIORITIES FOR LWCF FUNDING

Outdoor recreation priorities are based on responses to the public and the community recreation provider surveys conducted by Alaska State Parks in the spring of 2004. Only those projects that meet a priority need identified in the SCORP are eligible for LWCF funding.

STATE PRIORITIES

The following are priorities for Alaska State Parks and other state agencies that manage outdoor recreation resources (e.g., Alaska Department of Fish and Game, and the Alaska Department of Natural Resources, Division of Mining, Land and Water).

Figure 6.1 – State Priorities

PROJECT TYPE	PRIORITY
Rehabilitate, upgrade or expand existing high-demand facilities	High
Construct public use cabins/Expand public use cabin system	High
Rehabilitate, upgrade or expand trails/trailheads	High
Land acquisition of in-holdings or access to existing recreation lands and facilities	Medium
Provide more facilities for the disabled	Medium
Acquisition of wetlands to protect recreation values	Medium
Land acquisition for new parks or outdoor recreation areas	Low

COMMUNITY PRIORITIES

The following are priorities for community recreation projects.

Figure 6.2 – Community Priorities

PROJECT TYPE	PRIORITY
Community parks/playgrounds	High
Trails	High
Winter facilities	High
Public use cabins	High
Campgrounds	High
Rehabilitate, upgrade or expand existing facilities	High
Meet accessibility requirements of ADA	Medium
Boat launches	Medium
Skate parks	Medium
Land acquisition of in-holdings or access to existing recreation lands and facilities	Medium
Land acquisition for new parks or outdoor recreation areas	Low

Note: Community parks, field sports (e.g., baseball, soccer), outside court sports (e.g., basketball, volleyball), picnic areas, and playgrounds/tot lots have been combined into one category: “community parks/playgrounds”. “Trails” include summer and winter motorized, non-motorized trails, and multi-use trails. “Winter facilities” include sheltered or open outdoor hockey and ice skating rinks, sledding areas, downhill and cross country ski areas, and warming huts. Skate parks include roller blade, skateboard, and roller skate parks and paths.

THE OPEN PROJECT SELECTION PROCESS SCHEDULE

The following is a target timeline to be used when funding is anticipated for the program. Variables such as ORTAB meeting dates, staffing levels and obtaining final application documentation from sponsor could alter this timeline.

September - Public announcements of anticipated funding made and preliminary applications solicited.

December – Preliminary applications due to SLO. Approximately 90 days provided for the submission after announcement.

January – Hold public meeting of the Outdoor Recreation and Trails Advisory Board to review and rank preliminary applications. SLO approves final ranking.

February through April – SLO staff works with sponsors whose preliminary applications ranked high enough to be funded to complete full application packages.

May – full application packages submitted to the National Park Service for final approval.